Proposed New Criteria and Policies for Membership in the Graduate Faculty

Background/Justification

Historically, as Penn State evolved from a “farmer’s college” to become a research-intensive university, Graduate Faculty membership was initially established to serve research doctorate (Ph.D.) training, including supervising PhD. dissertation research, chairing and serving as a member of Ph.D. committees, and teaching graduate courses (500- and 600-level) related to research degree programs. In a number of disciplines, professional master's programs with well-established degrees (e.g., M.F.A., M. Arch, M.L.A., etc.) developed and tenure-line faculty in departments that offered these terminal degrees were included in the Graduate Faculty, with a culminating experience appropriate to the discipline an expectation for these advanced degrees (e.g., performance, creative works, design studio projects, etc.). However, Graduate Faculty membership was still organized largely around research doctorate training, with the existing categories of Graduate Faculty membership reflecting this (e.g., Form A membership for tenure-line faculty in departments that offer the Ph.D.; Form B for tenure-line faculty in departments that do not offer the Ph.D. or for FT faculty with the highest (not terminal) degree in the field and a scholarly record, with expected duties that focused on contributing to doctoral training, and with nomination by the head of a Ph.D. program).

As professional master’s education and associated degrees have grown, a new category of professionally-oriented graduate courses (800-level) that emphasize practice in the field was created, as was a new category of Graduate Faculty membership (Category C) that allowed for individuals without the highest degree but with professional experience appropriate to the field to teach 800-level courses. However, Category C did not allow for other duties such as advising graduate students and supervising the culminating experience in a professional master’s degree program. As a consequence, academic units that were growing professional master’s programs were constrained, and increasingly individuals were nominated for Form B membership (requiring the highest degree, in most cases a Ph.D.), who had little or no scholarly record or active program of research/scholarship, specifically to support professional master’s degree programs. This has led to a growth of Category B membership with an increasing number of individuals not actively engaged in research doctorate training (which negatively impacted the outcomes of some of Penn State’s Ph.D. programs in the most recent NRC rankings when Graduate Faculty lists included members who were not research active), while not allowing for the necessary faculty capacity for the growing portfolio of professional master’s degrees, particularly those delivered online. In particular, individuals with professional master’s degrees and relevant professional experience neither qualified for Graduate Faculty membership under Form B, nor were allowed the necessary broader range of privileges under Form C.

Despite efforts to modify the existing categories to better accommodate the changing landscape of graduate education (e.g., allowance for Form B membership for individuals with the highest degree, but without an active program of research/scholarship who would participate in only a professional master’s degree program), the overall organization of Graduate Faculty membership is currently not well rationalized for the changing institutional needs.

The proposed new criteria and organization of Graduate Faculty membership are based upon several overarching principles, as follows:
1. Membership in the Graduate Faculty is not intended for the limited purpose of teaching a graduate course(s), or for serving on a singular or occasional doctoral committee. Nor is it intended as a means to recognize an individual who holds a graduate degree and may be employed at the University in a non-academic role. Membership is intended for individuals who will participate broadly in the training of graduate students (e.g., supervising research master’s or doctoral research or the culminating experience in a professional master’s program; serving on program committees; chairing doctoral committees; etc.) on an ongoing basis, and in the case of Ph.D., M.S. and M.A. degree programs, who have an active program of research/scholarship appropriate to the field.

2. The Graduate School recognizes that many individuals who are not eligible for membership in the Graduate Faculty nonetheless have the potential to bring significant knowledge and experience to our graduate students. Appropriately-qualified individuals who are not members of the Penn State Graduate Faculty may teach graduate-level courses, including under certain conditions for multiple year periods, with the permission of the Dean of the Graduate School (see form - Recommendation for Approval to teach 500- or 800-level Courses [PDF] by non-members of the Graduate Faculty), or serve as a Special Member of a doctoral committee, and graduate programs may utilize these means to provide opportunities for such individuals to become engaged in graduate education.

3. Proposed new categories of membership (R and P) have been more clearly delineated and rationalized based upon training students in research doctorate and master’s degree programs (Ph.D., M.S. and M.A.) versus professional doctorate and master's degree programs (e.g., D.M.A., D.N.P., M.B.A., M.F.A), respectively, with qualifications and responsibilities appropriate to these broad categories. Both allow for suitably qualified faculty in Full-Time Fixed-Term and Standing appointments to participate.

4. Tenure-line faculty, by virtue of their appointments, have undergone a more competitive selection and hiring process with an emphasis on scholarly achievement and potential; presumably have a longer-term and thereby greater investment in graduate education at the University; are inculcated with the shared values and standards for quality and best practices in graduate teaching and learning; and are continually at the forefront of advancements in their respective fields. As such, they are afforded broad privileges of Graduate Faculty membership in both categories, and are solely allowed to serve as the Head of a graduate program who is responsible for providing academic leadership. This is to ensure that all graduate programs, including professional doctorate and master’s degrees, are tied to the research and scholarship of the University. Alternatively, it is recognized that non-tenure-line faculty bring significant knowledge, commitment and expertise to their positions, and Graduate Faculty with such appointments may be delegated oversight for graduate programs as the Professor-In-Charge (PIC)/Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), as appropriate to their qualifications and Category of membership.

5. As is the case with the existing categories of Graduate Faculty membership (A, B, and C), the new categories of R and P are internal designations. For purposes of displaying Graduate Faculty listings in the public domain (e.g., the Graduate Bulletin; department/graduate program web sites; etc.), the designation “Graduate Faculty” is to be used, with faculty lists organized by degree groupings. For example:
GRADUATE FACULTY IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION:

Ph.D., M.S. Programs
(faculty listing)

M.B.A. Program
(faculty listing)

Note - In many cases, faculty may appear in more than one degree program listing.

6. In some academic units, better alignment of the professional graduate degree programs in the unit are a function of the need to convert what have historically been categorized as 500-level courses (i.e., the courses were created prior to the establishment of 800-level graduate professional courses) to be more appropriately categorized as 800-level. Expedited processes are in place for appropriately focused professional graduate courses to be re-categorized as 800-level, and academic units should contact the dean’s office for further guidance.

If approved, the new criteria and policies would take effect beginning in Fall 2015, as multiple administrative procedural revisions and system changes (reprogramming) will be required in order for the proposed criteria and policies to be operationalized fully. One example is the conversion of all existing Graduate Faculty members to the new categories. While implementation is beyond the scope of the Committee on Academic Standards, the Committee foresees the following:

(a) Faculty currently appointed as members of the Graduate Faculty under Form A will primarily convert to Category R, based upon their qualifications and primary program affiliation (the program listed in their original nomination);

(b) Faculty who are tenure line and currently appointed as members of the Graduate Faculty under Form B will primarily convert to Category R, based upon their qualifications and primary program affiliation (the program listed in their original nomination);

(c) Faculty who are non-tenure line and appointed as members of the Graduate Faculty under Form B will convert to Category R or Category P, based upon their qualifications and primary program affiliation (the program listed in their original nomination);

(d) Faculty appointed under Form C will be granted a one-year grace period from the effective date of implementation of the proposed revisions to the criteria and policies, in order to allow graduate programs to request the appointment be changed to Category P, or to submit a request for approval to teach, as may be appropriate. If an individual currently appointed to Category C is not requested to be appointed as a Category P member, the individual’s membership in the Graduate Faculty will expire at the end of the one-year grace period, which does not preclude future requests for approval to teach a graduate course.